the interests of farmers, processors and consumers, the import duty structure on edible oils is reviewed from time to time. No change is presently envisaged in the rate of duty on palm oil.

Telephone facilities in villages of U.P.

*233. SHRI ABU ASIM AZMI:
SHRI AMAR SINGH:

Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) the number of villages in Uttar Pradesh which have not been provided with telephone facilities as yet; and

(b) by when this is likely to be provided?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI ARUN SHOURIE): (a) and (b) There are 103396 revenue villages in the State of U.P. Out of these, 97170 villages have already been provided with telecom facility by BSNL as on 31.01.2003. Out of 6226 uncovered villages, 6021 are uninhabited villages. In the remaining 205 villages, the custodians could not be finalised due to factors like court cases, factional rivalries within the village, other local disputes etc. The Village Public Telephones (VPTs) in these 205 villages shall be provided as and when the disputes get settled.

Maintenance of NH-57

†*234. PROF. RAM DEO BHANDARY: Will the Minister of ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether road from Darbhanga to Jhanjharpur, particularly from Sakri to Jhanjharpur on National Highway-57 is in a dilapidated condition and not suitable for transport;

(b) whether any funds have been allocated for repair and strengthening of the road;

(c) if so, the details of the amount allocated/spent, so far; and

†Original notice of the Question was received in Hindi

(d) the steps Government are taking for strengthening the road from Sakri to Jhanjharpur at the earliest?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS (MAJ. GEN.(RETD.) B.C. KHANDURI): (a) At present, the maintenance and repair of Muzafarpur-Darbhanga-Sakri-Jhanjharpur section of NH-57 is being got done through Public Works Department, Government of Bihar, by National Highways Authority of India (NHAI). The road in a length of about 16.5 km from Sakri to Jhanjharpur on NH-57 is reported to be damaged.

(b) Yes, Sir.

(c) An amount of about Rs. 1800 lakhs have been allocated during last three years for imporvement of 42 kms of National Highway length and reconstruciton/repair of 9 bridges on NH-57. Out of this, an amount of Rs. 1245 lakhs has been spent and 42 km length of NH and reconstruction of 1 bridge has been completed.

(d) This road is a part of East-West Corridor and its four-laning and strengthening are proposed to be taken up during 2004 under National Highway Development Project, Phase-II programme and targeted to be completed by December, 2007.

Assistance for improving it services

*235. SHRI MOOLCHAND MEENA:
DR. T. SUBBARAMI REDDY:

Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether there is an imminent shake-out among the mid-sized IT services and business process outsourcing companies;

(b) if so, whether at least five to ten mandates are doing the rounds of investment banking circles where mid-sized IT services companies are seeking to consolidate among themselves;

(c) whether the banks have also been asked to help these IT companies by providing loan, etc. so that they would be able to improve the IT services in the country; and